

# Learning from Your Child's Teacher

*National Mental Health Information Center*

You know how your child behaves at home, but do you really know what he or she is like at school? Now is a good time to find out if your child is ready to learn. A child's mental health is an important factor in his or her ability to do well in school.

Mental health is how a child thinks, feels, and acts. Mental health problems can affect any child—even elementary or preschool children. These problems are more common than you may think. One in five children has a diagnosable mental, emotional, or behavior problem that can lead to school failure, family discord, violence, or suicide. Help is available, but two-thirds of children with mental health problems are not getting the help they need.

The federal Center for Mental Health Services, a component of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is urging parents and teachers to talk about mental health. Your child's teacher should be your ally. He or she can help you decide if your child may need help.

Here are a few questions you should discuss with your child's teacher.

1. Does my child seem angry most of the time? Cry a lot? Overreact to things?
2. Does my child destroy school property or do things that are life threatening? Harm other children on the playground? Break rules over and over again?
3. Does my child appear sad or anxious much of the time? Show an unusual concern about grades or tests?
4. Does my child seem obsessed about how he looks? Often complain about headaches, stomachaches, or other physical problems—especially when it's time to take a test or participate in classroom social activities?
5. Is my child unable to sit still or focus her attention? Make decisions? Respect your authority as a teacher?
6. Has my child lost interest in things usually enjoyed, such as sports, music, or other school activities? Suddenly started avoiding friends?

If you and your child's teacher answer "yes" to any of these questions, and the problem seems persistent or severe, then you need to find out if a mental health problem is contributing to this behavior. It's not easy for parents to accept that their child may have a problem. Early treatment can help your child succeed in the classroom, but it is important that you seek help.

Here are some tips to get you started.

- Get more information. Call 1-800-789-CMHS (2647) to receive a free brochure or other materials about children's mental health.
- Talk with your pediatrician or health care provider. He or she can check your child for other factors that can inhibit learning, such as poor eyesight or hearing. Together, you may decide that your child and family need help from someone with more mental health training.
- Take an active role in helping your child get better. Every child and every parent has strengths. Helping your child do his or her homework gives you a chance to share your time and your experience with your child. This can strengthen the bond between you and your child. It also can teach you what interests your child.
- Keep looking until you find the right services and the right providers for your child. Be patient, yet persistent. When it comes to mental health services, one size does not fit all. There are several national organizations and advocacy groups that can help you find services in your community.
- Children need consistency — both in the home and in the classroom. By working together, parents and teachers can reinforce a child's strengths — such as curiosity, caring for animals, or a sense of humor. That's a big part of being a caring parent or teacher.

**For more information** on responding to mental health needs in times of crises, or to find out about local mental health services, contact 1-800-789-2647, or visit [www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov) (click on "crisis counseling").

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[www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/Ca-0031/default.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/Ca-0031/default.asp)

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